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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NOUAKCHOTT 000468

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SUBJECT: UNPUBLISHED OFFICIAL REPORT CONFIRMS PROBLEMS WITH
ID CARDS ISSUANCE IN SOUTHERN PROVINCE OF MAURITANIA

REF: NOUAKCHOTT 409

Classified By: Amb. Joseph LeBaron, Reasons 1.4 (b),(d)

(C) Key Points

-- An unpublished report from the Regional Electoral Commission in Trarza, an important province in southern Mauritania, found significant problems there in the application process for National ID cards.

-- To register to vote, Mauritians must have ID cards.

-- The uncirculated report, given to us in confidence by the UN, states that the number of citizens "without any civil documents remains very high."

-- Nevertheless, the report is largely supportive of the government's census and voter registration efforts in the province. It states that, despite the problems that the provincial branch of the independent electoral commission has found, the census and registration process has gone well. The report notes that as of March 22, nearly 75 pct of eligible voters in the region had registered.

(C) Comments

-- Significantly, the report does not mention any racial aspect of the problem. But Trarza is a southern province with a large number of Afro-Mauritians. It is impossible to say exactly how large the number is, since no census in Mauritania ever tracks the sensitive subject of race.

-- However, one indication of a racial link to the problem is this: statistics in the report show that the ID card issue is a great problem in the provincial districts with reportedly higher percentages of Afro-Mauritanian residents.

-- Embassy believes the tenor and judgments in the report will be echoed in the national electoral commission's report to the UN electoral assistance team, which is engaged in a mid-point evaluation of the government's census and registration campaign.

-- Further, the Embassy expects the UN team to find that, even with the problems so far identified, Mauritania is on track to meet international standards in its voter registration drive.

End Key Points and Comments.

¶1. (C) In an unpublished report from the National Independent Electoral Commission's regional commission in Trarza (one of Mauritania's southern, predominately Afro-Mauritanian regions) the commission has found that significant problems persist in the process of applying for National ID cards (required for the voter registration, scheduled to end April 30). The report was passed in confidence to Ambassador through the UN Permanent Representative here.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

¶2. (C) The report finds that the situation with the ID cards "remains troubling," as the number of eligible voters "without any civil documents remains very high." The report goes on to say that "the failure to resolve this question...could contribute to lessening the effectiveness of the election results."

¶3. (C) However, the report is largely supportive of the government's census and voter registration efforts, stating that, despite the problems the commission has found, the process has gone well. The report notes that as of March 22, nearly 75 pct of eligible voters in the region had registered.

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¶4. (C) The report is light on recommendations, stating only that the administration needs to give clearer guidance to the field.

¶5. (C) The report also states that the census was stopped in El Arya (a community in the Moughataa of Wad Naga) due to a "massive influx" of people coming from Nouakchott to register in the community. The report said such an influx would weaken the credibility of the voter list. (Note: The decision to stop the census was likely tied to the ongoing fear of "strategic registration" where populations will register in a community outside of their residential community in the hope of influencing the electoral outcome in that community. Mauritanian law prohibits the registering of an individual in a community they have not resided in during the previous six months. End Note.)

REPORT STATISTICS

¶6. (C) While the government does not collect racial or ethnic data, we have identified two Moughataas as predominately Moor (both White and Black Moor), three as predominately Afro-Mauritanian, and one as mixed. We have included these findings in the report's statistics summarized below. Obtaining a birth certificate is the first step toward applying for a national ID card, which in turn allows the voter to register.

STATISTICS FOR THE TRARZA REGION BY MOUGHATAA:

-- Mederdra: Ethnically mixed
Number of people registered: 13,375
Number of requests received for ID cards: 2,128
Number and percentage of ID cards issued: 903 -- 42 percent
Number of requests received for birth certificates: NA
Number and percentage of birth certificates issued: 169 -- percent NA

-- Boutilimit: Majority Moor

Number of people registered: 21,898
Number of requests received for ID cards: 1,000
Number and percentage of ID cards issued: 903 -- 90 percent
Number of requests received for birth certificates: 1,444
Number and percentage of birth certificates issued: 600 -- 42 percent

-- Wad Naga: Majority Moor

Number of people registered: 22,108
Number of requests received for ID cards: 1,000
Number and percentage of ID cards issued: 400 -- 40 percent
Number of requests received for birth certificates: 2,234
Number and percentage of birth certificates issued: 780 -- 35 percent

-- R'Kiz: Majority Afro-Mauritanian

Number of people registered: 24,242
Number of requests received for ID cards: 1,468
Number and percentage of ID cards issued: 107 -- 7 percent
Number of requests received for birth certificates: 613
Number and percentage of birth certificates issued: NA

-- Keur Macene: Majority Afro-Mauritanian

Number of people registered: 14,472
Number of requests received for ID cards: NA
Number and percentage of ID cards issued: NA
Number of requests received for birth certificates: 162
Number and percentage of birth certificates issued: 54 -- 33 percent

-- Rosso: Majority Afro-Mauritanian

Number of people registered: 18,620
Number of requests received for ID cards: NA
Number and percentage of ID cards issued: NA
Number of requests received for birth certificates: NA
Number and percentage of birth certificates issued: NA

POST'S ANALYSIS OF STATISTICS

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¶7. (C) According to our identification of Moughataas predominated by Afro-Mauritanians versus Moors, it appears that a) the problems in receiving ID cards and birth certificates are worse in predominately Afro-Mauritanian Moughataas, and b) data collection in these Afro-Mauritanian Moughataas is poorer than in the Moorish Moughataas. For example, the two predominately Moorish Moughataas of Boutilimit and Wad Naga averaged 65 percent issuance rates for ID cards, and 38 percent issuance rates for birth certificates. While among the three predominately Afro-Mauritanian Moughataas, only R'Kiz had complete ID data, with a 7 percent issuance rate (out of a significant sample size of 1,468 applications), and only Keur Macene had data on birth certificates, with an issuance rate of 33 percent.
LeBaron